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NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

BACK TO PEACE IN 1865¹

ONE reason why so little public attention was given to human reconstruction and the social aspects of demobilization in 1865 was that the then dominant generation, blending the individualism of Jefferson, of Emerson, of Andrew Jackson, and of John Stuart Mill, believed that such problems were for individual solution. Doubtless shell-shock cases existed—we have most of us known veterans probably still suffering from the failure to treat it properly; undoubtedly there were economic and social hardships which might have been ameliorated—yet on the whole the individualistic method, modified by the humane neighborliness which equally characterized the Americans of the period, did result in the successful absorption of the veterans into civil life. No historian would, and no lay person should, however, deduce therefrom that such a system would work equally well to-day. No one can say whether our economic system is more or less elastic than it was, though the richness of the unexploited frontier of 1865 probably was a determining advantage; but at least the localization of the immediate effects of the war to our country rendered conditions strikingly different, and the distinctively war industries were less important.

Of course, no amount of individualism could prevent the government from having some policy and that policy from having some effect upon the situation. That policy was demobilization at the earliest possible time, by units, at the most convenient place for the unit as a whole. There was no attempt to pick out pivotal men, or to use the interval between peace and discharge for schooling.

¹ Professor Fish, now in London in charge of the interests there of the American University Union, sends this note with the following comment. [Ed.]

"These notes are the result of a long-continued study of the problem of the absorption of the discharged soldiers of 1865 into the life of the community, each phase of it having been at some time a leading topic of seminar treatment for at least a year. It was my purpose to have condensed the whole into an article for the *Review*. Separated as I have been from my notes, this has been impossible, but I felt that, in view of the immediate importance of the subject, it might be worth while to present at this time some conclusions even without the evidence. It will be appreciated how much I am indebted to various members of my successive seminars, some of whom I hope will produce reasoned articles on subjects here touched upon."

Minor problems similar to those of to-day were constantly arising. The semi-jocular "grousing" of the soldiers in the different Union armies alarmed timid souls who feared to bring Grant's and Sherman's men to Washington together. Grant's detention and shifting of men to meet the Mexican situation and Indian difficulties was feared by some as having militaristic intent. There was, however, little important complaint of unfairness in dealing with the different units. By train, steamer, canal boat, and coach, in the order of importance given, a tidal wave swept northward in July and August, 1865, and in diminishing volume, petering out to a thin trickle during the remainder of that year and the first half of 1866, until June saw normal military conditions almost re-established. The Confederates, turned loose, like the prisoners from some of the German camps, but into a friendly countryside, wandered home on foot and horseback—and got there first.

The Confederate, however, arrived home penniless; the Union soldier with a real "wad". There were no allowances nor maintenance grants, with strings attached, but on account of undrawn pay, partially paid bounties, and other claims, varying sums, rather substantial, were paid the soldier on discharge. The official records show that final payments averaged about two hundred and fifty dollars. The press, letters, and diaries give character to this average. Chiefly we read of sums stolen from soldiers. In August, I note soldiers robbed of the following sums: \$318, \$130, \$300, \$570, \$175, \$450, \$250. One had \$800 taken when boarding the boat for home, one left \$550 on the floor of a street-car in Milwaukee, one lost \$250 in a saloon. One man sent \$409.14 to Secretary McCulloch, "it being his father's desire he should give his services to his country".

These sums specially mentioned are nearly all above the average, and the impression they create is probably the more correct, for many soldiers saved money from bounties and pay previously received, or received additional sums later. One man received \$200, but had saved \$250; two Indians in August, 1865, had \$600, received as bounty money, substitute service, and pay.

It is apparent that in thus providing a nest-egg, the government did something to assist the working of the individualistic method, for not all such possessions were stolen or disdained. The sums were sufficient not only to tide men over a period of looking for work, but even to allow them an independent start in life. In authenticated instances, a veteran used his money to attend the University of Wisconsin, and others to buy farms. A small amount

of money in 1865 smoothed a good deal of rough road. Similar sums in the hands of Southern soldiers might have gone far to quicken the economic recovery of that section, whose brave sons received, from their states, good artificial limbs, to replace such as they might have lost, but nothing more.

The striking economic difference between the North and South, however, was in the number of new jobs awaiting the returned soldier in the former. Had they wished it, all could have had farms in the West, and the world would have consumed the products thereof. In fact, between 1865 and 1870, over two hundred thousand new farms were opened in the region of the Upper Mississippi, and nearly one hundred thousand in the valley of the Missouri. The relation of such facts to the soldier returning with money in his pocket is obvious; so obvious that it has been exaggerated. It is true that four years of out-of-door life makes indoor confinement irksome for a time, and so impels some to farming. This is, however, almost purely a physical condition that disappears. The further argument that war develops a spirit of roving and adventure is just about as true as the reverse statement. Adventure is for the adventurous, and more go to such wars as our Civil War and this Great War, than the lovers of adventure; as many react to peace and quietness and home, as to wandering. Many of these farms were opened up by soldiers, and some by those who would not have done so, had there been no war, but the number of farms opened was probably not very different from what it would have been had there been no war, nor was the personnel of the pioneers probably different in any very large measure. Equally important was the simultaneous expansion of manufacturing, which in the case of six great industries created in the same period three hundred and sixty thousand new jobs.

For tracing the actual soldier to the particular job, the censuses of neither the United States, nor of particular states, afford data. It is still possible to secure some information by personal interview, but the method that proved most profitable was based on the use of biographical material, particularly those biographies found in county histories, which, lacking the candor of the *Spoon River Anthology*, still can be relied upon for certain classes of formal facts. Such a study deals with thousands instead of millions, and to complete it would be a Herculean task; but the results are fact and not conjecture, and so some gleanings are presented as to occupations immediately before and after army service.

Of 275 cases of New Yorkers studied, 168 took up their old

business or something similar and 107 entered different businesses, but of this latter number, twenty-two had been "at home". Long service somewhat increased the tendency to shift; of those serving four or more years, fifty-four returned to their old occupations, forty-eight changed; of the three-year men, sixty-six returned and thirty-six shifted; of two-year men, twenty-nine returned and ten changed; of those who were in the army one year or less, nineteen returned to their old life, thirteen sought new fields. Of farmers and farm laborers, sixty-eight returned to the farm, twenty-two sought other occupations, this being almost a dead loss to agriculture, as only eight went into farming from another occupation. Twenty-four doctors clung to their profession, the only wanderers being five who obtained political positions. The next largest class is particularly significant; fourteen students became students again, eleven went into business, and to the fourteen were added twelve not previously listed as students, being more than went into any other single new occupation, except politics which took fourteen.

Light on perhaps a slightly different stratum of soldier-citizens is thrown by their applications for positions in the *New York Herald* for August, 1865. Of ninety-eight advertising, only six mention experience; seventeen wished to be clerks, sixteen porters, nine drivers, and so on in diminishing numbers, to one who wished to be a horn-player in a band, and one an interpreter of Italian; sixteen were willing to receive any offer.

Wisconsin, with a narrower range of industries, was more conservative. Of 361 men, 259 returned to their old occupation, 102 sought new, including ten who had not previously been employed. Here long service counted even more than in New York to wean men away from their old life. Of the four-year veterans, almost half sought new fields; of the three-year men, not quite a quarter; of the two-year men, about a fifth; of the yearlings, less than a sixth. Farming held 141, lost thirty-two, and gained thirteen. The doctors remained solid. Students again were relatively numerous and tenacious: eight continued; eight dropped systematic study; ten became students, having previously been farmers, lumbermen, teachers, harness-makers, and three "at home". Law held its own better than in New York, where twelve returned, five departed, and only one entered the profession, for in Wisconsin eleven returned and only one departed. Lumbering, always a shifting occupation, called six back, lost nine, and gained eight.

Iowa was an agricultural frontier state, one of those that attracted the discharged soldier. It afforded unusual opportunities

for study, about fifteen hundred cases being examined. These were divided into those of Iowa soldiers, about a thousand, and ex-soldiers who came to Iowa from other states, about five hundred. The former were unusually conservative, about eight in ten returning to their former occupation, one changing and one having been too young for occupation before entering service. Length of service made little difference to these men: 443 went back to farms; only forty-one farmers changed occupation; thirty-eight changed to farming, and fifty-one boys entered farming. The professions, generally undermanned in frontier states, held all their members, except that one doctor became a minister. Ninety students stuck to their books; nine became at once lawyers and doctors, seven dropped their studies, and three took up study. Twenty-one men unsettled before the war became settled; ten remained unsettled; twelve became unsettled. A significant decadence was that in teaching, which held only two, gained one, and lost eleven.

Naturally, those who came to the state were of a more changeable character; about three in five returned to their occupations, one in five changed, and one in five was too young to have had an occupation. Length of service here had something to do with the breaking of occupational habits, but not as much as in New York and Wisconsin, probably owing to the dominating importance of agriculture. About one-third of the four-year men changed, one-fourth of the three- and one-year men, and one-third of the two-year men. Farming was the great attraction, but it attracted chiefly farmers. As I remarked the other day to an Englishman who said that English farmers, unlike those of America, did not need agricultural colleges because they could learn from their fathers, the ancestors of the majority of American farmers have been of that trade, if not from the days of Adam, at least from the time agriculture began. One hundred and seventy-seven continued tillage on new farms; twenty-six farmers became bankers, merchants, book-keepers, confectioners, carpenters, coopers, ticket agents, railroad men, and so forth, while thirty-three ex-teachers, ditchers, miners, teamsters, lumbermen, merchants, engineers, and so forth, became farmers, as did sixty-one who were too young to have had previous occupation. Doctors and lawyers for the most part continued practice, but ministers on wandering became "unsettled", and teachers tended to buy farms. Carriage-makers and blacksmiths generally found employment at their old trades; forty-five students continued study; thirty-five dropped school, of whom twenty-two became doctors, lawyers, and teachers. A circus performer became a travelling

salesman; a photographer became a farmer; stone-masons, marble-cutters, carpenters, druggists, horse-dealers, and dentists, for the most part found their talents of use in meeting the obvious needs of their new community.

It was not, however, men alone who had been mobilized. All through the West, travellers in war-time had seen the sight, unfamiliar in America, of women working in the fields, and in the factory districts they had replaced men in all kinds of services, not to the extent to which they have in Great Britain in this war, but to a greater extent than they have in America. The substantial records of American opinion and conditions stride forward with fixed steps, by congresses, administrations, and decennial censuses, disregarding irregular pulsations, and so no quantitative measure, such as a census even as unreliable as that of 1870 would give, exists. That census, indeed, compared with the one in 1860, with small exceptions, knows these women not. Fortunately, statistics collected in Massachusetts and New York in 1865 give a partial memorial of their activity. A comparison of these figures with those of 1860 and 1870 shows that women for the most part dropped out of occupations previously unusual for them (with the exception of two), when the men returned. On the farms the women quietly returned to kitchen and dairy, in towns they re-established homes or swelled the ranks in the usual feminine fields. In the case of school-teaching, however, they clung to the positions formerly held by men, which they had secured, creating a familiar and characteristic American condition. For reasons less obvious, they remained in large numbers, also, in the printing shops, to which Benjamin Franklin had long before commended them.

The total effect of the war on the position of women was indeed marked, curious, and complex, but in so far as the great majority of those called suddenly into new occupations was concerned, they became demobilized with the men.

The question of children in industry is even more difficult, for no census before 1870 recorded their industrial pursuits. This might seem an evidence that the problem of child labor had assumed a new importance, but it might merely mean that the public conscience was newly aroused. Certainly we know that the problem was not altogether new, and that American children had worked, both in a wholesome way about the home and farm, and many of them in unwholesome factories. The only method of getting at comparative figures has seemed to be by comparison of proportions of school attendance in 1860 and 1870, for which statistics of vary-

ing reliability and significance exist for all the northern states. These figures are indeed striking. Only two states, Wisconsin and Vermont (or Connecticut) show increases, all the others show decreases, often startling. When one considers that the later date is 1870, when the more immediate results of the war had passed away, and when one considers also the figures which show the naturally expected deficiency in the actual number of children born in the war years, one realizes the awful cost of the war in stunting the new generation.

As to the habits, and the spiritual and the physical condition of the men demobilized, one can judge only by evidences still less direct. The men did learn to wear ready-made clothes; they did not become militaristic in their ideas. No generation has existed in the United States so fundamentally opposed to war and to territorial expansion; never before was the army brought down to so small a percentage of the population, so little attention given to the militia, and the navy allowed so rapidly to dwindle away; the military training so toilsomely acquired was used chiefly to make political processions gay. Some did become unsettled and lawless, but the attempt to proportion the amount of disorder between that resulting from frontier characteristics, and that from the war, is apparently quite futile. The overwhelming majority settled down to the quiet life of ordinary citizens, except that some greater proportion than usual felt, as did Dr. Johnson's interlocutor, that the world, or more particularly the country, owed them a living. In disregard of property-rights, and particularly of the sanctity of public property, there was, perhaps, some unusual laxity in the later career of the Civil War generation; and it is quite arguable that this may have been a result of war conditions, with the waste and plunder of government stores that was so wide-spread, and the pillaging which occasionally marked the advance of armies. Rape had been extremely uncommon, and of other such immoral practices as entailed physical degeneration, the reticence of that mid-Victorian period allowed small evidence to survive. The extent of the advertisements of venereal remedies, however, often running to nearly half the advertising space even in reputable papers, alone shows that the problem existed, while public opinion forbade effective measures for handling it. Nor was the régime of the camps such as to instill any offsetting sanitary habits of life. Bathing and real cleanliness remained matters of personal desire, and of inheritance, though a general feeling for a greater spruceness of appearance than had been characteristic of American men may be traced to

military inspection. Feeding continued to be a matter of abundance, put away in haste, with some modifications through the replacement of individual preparation by ready-to-eat concoctions, whose ingredients were to remain long unsupervised by law.

Certainly army life between 1861 and 1865 had much less relation to normal life than army life of to-day. Special services were few, and the soldierly routine was largely a matter of the manual of arms. It is as yet uncertain how effective the attempts to introduce civilian education into the camps will be, but, with the pervasive scope of modern war, a large proportion of the soldiers of to-day have had to study, have acquired the power of mental concentration, and very often have laid a practical foundation for some craft which may serve them afterwards. The boys of 1861 carried away from the army little except a certain physical responsiveness and a habit of discipline. Yet one by-product of war experience was probably not without national significance. The Civil War armies were large and the administrative problems involved in handling them developed the talent of many of those who were the instruments in transforming the United States in a single generation from a nation with an industrial life relatively very simple, to one well in the van of our modern, complex, economic civilization.

One of the tragedies of the Civil War is that the army that saved the Union retained, or, more correctly, after having been dissolved into the commonwealth for fifteen years, regained its self-consciousness chiefly through its efforts to secure what it considered an adequate reward for its services. Mild, indeed, and little menacing to the state as was its activity compared with that of many another victorious soldiery, it had an effect undeniably bad on the politics of the eighties and nineties, and it cooled, in the minds of many, the gratitude which should have warmed the last years of the veterans. That the total amount of pensions obtained was greatly in excess of the amount that the country should have paid and could afford to pay, is doubtful, but it was paid at a time when it served merely to smooth the difficulties of old age, instead of fitting for life, and it was so evenly distributed among those who needed and those who did not, that it seldom served as a strong door in cases where there was a real wolf. Much can doubtless be done to prevent a recurrence of such a situation, if the community, without waiting to be urged, adopts a generous plan, based on a broad conception of social obligation. Fundamentally, however, the best hope that the conscious influence of our new veterans may be directed along constructive lines, rests in the difference in the

public aims of the two wars. Those of the Civil War may be expressed in negative terms, that the Union should not be dissolved, and that slavery should be abolished. By 1868, at least, these objects had been attained.

The present war, at it has impressed itself on the American mind, has more resembled that of the Revolution, where the object was not only separation from Great Britain, but the founding of a new nation. As the veterans of that war found their task one that continued with scarcely abated interest their life long, so the veterans of this war, it may be hoped, will continue to throw their weight, united on the battle-field to overthrow the German imperial system, still united into the task of guarding a new world organization through its critical period.

CARL R. FISH.